

# DON'T PANIC!!



- A really useful University guide for students.

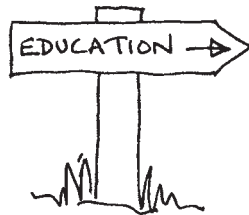


Illustrations by Setara Pracha, herself an alumna of the university (English Literature BA Hons '04). Setara now teaches in the English Department where part of her role is ensuring that the UB student experience continues to be a positive one.

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## Location

At UCAS fairs and in their publicity material, universities are showing off, and you could be forgiven for thinking that they are all full of beautiful students lounging in colonnaded arcades. Not surprisingly the reality is often disappointing.

Some universities are outside the town or city whose name they bear, and campuses may be old and ugly, or at worst unsafe. So whittling the list down to a few good prospects and then visiting should be an essential part of your selection process.

Will you be happier in a bustling but

perhaps anonymous city or in the country? On a self-contained campus or living in a local community? Will you thrive best facing the challenges of a large university where there are perhaps twenty thousand fellow students or in a smaller, more nurturing environment?

Does the geographical location matter to you – proximity to home or to airports, for example?

Buckingham is a growing market town in the heart of the English countryside. The University nestles close to its historic centre on the banks of the river Great Ouse. It is a friendly place where everyone knows each other. The

relatively quiet rural environment serves as a stimulating contrast to the international mix of the student body. At Buckingham you will experience cultural diversity every day and this will be a real part of your education.



## Course Structure and Quality

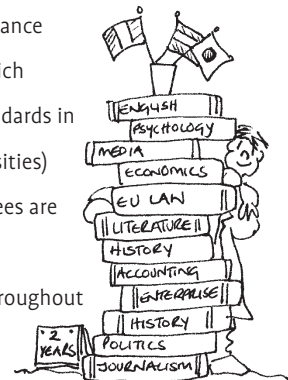
Most undergraduate courses in the United Kingdom last for three years; sometimes four, especially if a work placement or year abroad is involved. They usually start in October, though some universities now have a January start as well. Buckingham is more flexible and, depending on the course you choose, we have entry points in October, January and July, and our Foundation Courses start in April.

From its foundation in 1976, Buckingham has pioneered the 2-year honours degree – or rather, by having a fourth term

instead of the normal very long summer vacation, it is able to teach the content of a 3-year degree in two years. So there is no ‘watering-down’, and although you are expected to work hard, you are not put under undue pressure. Don’t confuse the Buckingham 2-year degree with the 2-year programmes now being piloted in other universities – where the summer vacation is used for ‘self-directed study’ or ‘distance learning’. At Buckingham, teaching and support continue throughout the year. Our 2-year degree enables you to embark on your career a year earlier than you might have done – or gives you time for a year of travel before the real world closes in. 3-year

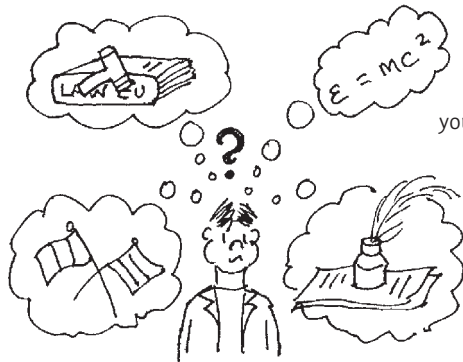
degree options are also available on some programmes for those who value the summer break.

Although Buckingham is not state funded, we are unique in having our own Royal Charter. We voluntarily undergo inspection by QAA (the government Quality Assurance Authority which oversees standards in all UK universities) and our degrees are respected by employers throughout the world.



## Choosing A Course

'Study what you enjoy most,' is always good advice. So is, 'Play to your strengths'. So don't be pushed by your school or your parents in a direction for which you have little appetite or aptitude.



With the current emphasis on 'employability', vocational courses are now especially popular. But all degree programmes, whether vocational or not, are designed to encourage broad skill sets (such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective writing and presentation) and these provide a firm foundation for a whole range of careers.

You should be especially cautious if you are attracted to a subject that you have not studied before: will the reality live up to the expectation? What is actually involved? Thorough research is crucial.

Remember that the programme content within a particular subject will vary from university to university. Read the small print! Talk to Admissions Tutors, lecturers and current students. Are your own particular interests properly catered for? Again, make sure that choices are the ones that are best for you.

Find out how courses are assessed. How many examinations are there and when are they taken? How much emphasis is placed on continuous assessment? How much assessed group work is involved? In the unlikely event of a wrong decision, would you be able to transfer to a different programme in the same

department or university? Credit transfer schemes from one university to another vary and at Buckingham our Admissions Assistants are happy to answer queries on any aspect of the Admissions process (see Useful Numbers page 20).

## *Class Size and Contact Time*

Recently the University Lecturers' Union has been claiming that standards are falling because of reduced contact-time between teachers and students. There are horror stories of vast lecture theatres with students forced to sit outside on the stairs in order to hear the lecture.

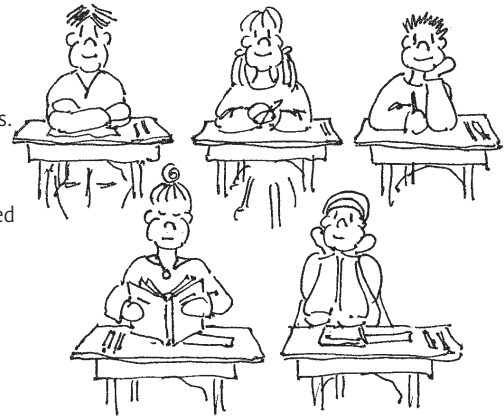
Although it is worth checking out the staff:student ratio of a university, in many research-led institutions this can be meaningless as some professors may not be involved in undergraduate teaching at all. Be aware that the reputation of some universities may be research-based and not due to the quality of the undergraduate experience. So, having fixed on some preferred courses, you should look carefully at the size of teaching groups.

For your short-list of courses, you need to find out:

- The size of teaching groups
- The contact hours each week

- The access to lecturers outside scheduled classes

If you are tempted by the reputation of particular lecturers, find out how much involvement you will actually have with them.



Although Buckingham is a centre for groundbreaking research in certain areas (for example in Biomedical Science, Computing and Education), it is predominantly a teaching university, combining a stimulating mixture of the traditional and the innovative when it comes to scholarship. Lectures are restricted in size and are backed up by small-group tutorials, where there is the chance for both further explanation and pursuit of particular interests. All lecturers also have generous 'Access Hours' and so are available to deal with individual problems as they arise. At Buckingham lecturers have regular study leave terms, and working on their own

publications ensures that their teaching remains fresh and stimulating.

Here, you will have a Personal Tutor within your school or department. They will be your first point of contact if you need advice. The Admissions Tutors are themselves Course Directors and they have enough time to encourage students to achieve their best. At Buckingham, no lecturer is ever too busy to attend to a student.

### *Student Support*

Sadly the note outside a lecturer's door saying, 'In case of emergency, I will usually be here at noon on Mondays'

is not a myth. Most undergraduates do thrive on independence and sort out problems for themselves. But what if you ever need support or help?

What is the medical provision? What help is available if you have a specific learning difficulty (or just a one-off concern)?



What support is there in case of emotional problems – which can range from the pain of a relationship break-up, to homesickness, to bereavement?

Buckingham is a close-knit community and the most important support comes from friends. Your Personal Tutor, who will usually be a teacher on your programme, is there to help you with academic concerns. There is also a Student Support Department, where the confidential services range from specialist tuition for dyslexics to counselling and mediation. The Students' Union Office may be the place for advice on more practical everyday matters.

Buckingham's Careers Department has a well-stocked library and organises regular events. There is plenty of time for individual guidance too.

## *Accommodation*

A happy domestic situation is a vital part of successful studying, and being sure of a convenient and safe place to stay is as important as choosing the right course. Inadequate or unpleasant accommodation will not help in obtaining a good class of degree.

So, are first year students guaranteed accommodation? If so, is that in a university residence or a rented house? Is

it on, or close to, the campus, or miles away in a less than appealing suburb? If so, what are the transport links, particularly late at night when student parties finish? Are rooms en suite? If not, how many to a bathroom; and to a kitchen? How are noise, security and first aid handled?



Does it matter to you whether mature students are located separately? Will you be allowed to bring a car? Is it wise to do so, and what are the parking charges?

At Buckingham all undergraduates are guaranteed accommodation on campus for the first year of their programme and (subject to availability) many choose to remain in Hall for their second year.

Facilities and charges vary, Internet access is available in all our residences, and cleaners come in every day to maintain public areas. There is a twenty-four hour security patrol, a duty Residences Manager on site, and

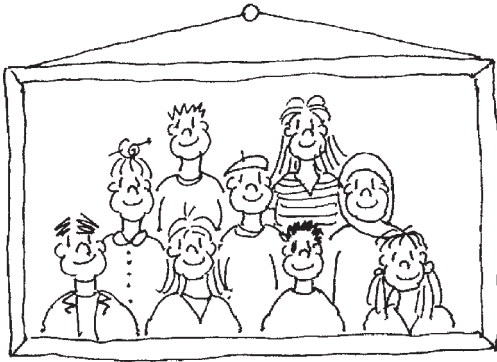
Residential Assistants in each block (an older student to help with day-to-day worries). Some Residences are reserved for those who prefer a quieter atmosphere. If you would rather be more independent, the town has a thriving rental market, with many houses and flats situated within a few minutes walk of the campus. One of the many advantages of living in Buckingham is that it is an attractive, safe environment conducive to serious scholarship.

### *Student Body*

Making friends and being happy is vital for success – so think about the nature of the student body at your short-listed

universities. Is there a preponderance of students from a particular background, and is that a good or bad thing? For some a 'comfort zone' may be desirable; for most, though, part of a university education is the opportunity to meet and befriend people from other cultures and countries.

One of the paradoxes of a Buckingham degree is that our rural location is combined with a truly international student body. There are sometimes students from more than eighty nations. Our undergraduates regard this as a real bonus, giving a dynamic boost to the academic programmes. Imagine sitting



in a history seminar on Empire and Dominion discussing current day repercussions with students from Africa, India and Europe – time to sharpen your opinions and check your facts!

## *Entertainment and Sports*

Generally, the larger the university the more the facilities, clubs and entertainment. Those situated in big cities attract students determined to make the most of their freedom in the first year.

However, in these competitive times students are realising that graduating a year ahead of their peers may just give them that critical edge in the employment race – and many come to Buckingham having already got the ‘high life’ out of their system.

At Buckingham, students work hard and

play hard. The Students’ Union arranges live bands, karaoke, parties and night clubbing excursions to Oxford and Cambridge, and students run clubs ranging from Drama to Dominoes. There are good transport links to Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes (from where a fast train to London takes less than forty minutes). For those who want the convenience of a car, there is (unusually for a university) plenty of free parking.

Buckingham’s small size means that opportunities are limited for those with a serious interest in team sports. However there is an annual hard-fought

competition between the Schools for the 'Chancellor's Cup', with events ranging from cricket and football to snooker and table-tennis. There is a well-equipped Fitness Centre and plenty of opportunities for individual sports. You can use the public indoor swimming pool, which is adjacent to the Verney Park site, and local clubs and teams are always happy to welcome our students.



## Visiting

Visiting is a must. It is a good idea to take along family or friends – universities expect this and it's always good to have another perspective.

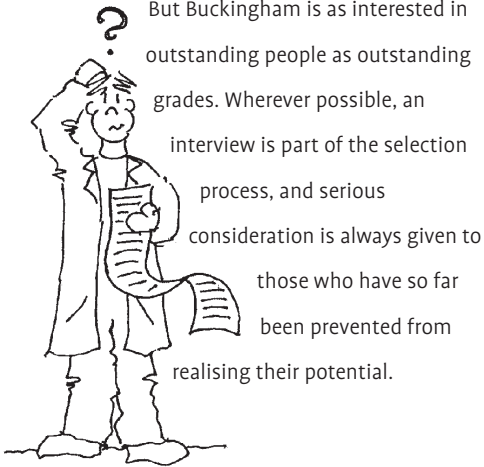
Most universities have Open Days and these are scheduled regularly. At an Open Day, there will probably be a group of parents and prospective students, one or more lectures by subject, a campus tour (ideally led by a current student), and a 'Q and A' session. Using the suggestions in this Guide, make a list of questions beforehand: don't feel intimidated and don't be afraid of probing for answers.



Smaller institutions are able to arrange more personal visits, structured and timetabled to suit you. At Buckingham a student will show you around, introduce you to faculty members and treat you to lunch: a pleasant introduction to a University that prides itself on the individual approach.

## Entry Requirements

Requirements vary from course to course: in the Law School, BBB at A level (or the equivalent) is the minimum requirement; other courses may ask for slightly less.



## Applying

The 325 Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom use the UCAS process (University Central Admissions Service) and this can be a tortuous experience. It is important to follow the advice in the UCAS handbook and to adhere to the many deadlines. However, schools often provide assistance with form filling through their Careers Departments and universities are keen to make the process less confusing. Advice on the dreaded 'Personal Statement' is given on page 12!

Applications to Buckingham may be made either through UCAS or directly to

the University at any time of year. Each application will be dealt with personally by an Admissions Officer in the relevant subject area: a friendly response and a prompt reply are guaranteed (but do send the necessary supporting documentation).

At the end of July, UCAS offers a 'Clearing' process for those who have not met the entry requirements for the October start in their chosen university. 'Clearing' is a minefield and wrong decisions can be taken in the wake of disappointment. We counsel strongly against accepting a place on an unpopular course with low entry requirements just for the sake of it.



Sometimes 'retakes' are a better alternative, however unpalatable. But Buckingham has a 'Clearing Hotline' and will do its utmost to help you if you can demonstrate real potential.

Remember – students begin Buckingham degrees in January, July and September. Check the programme details for your chosen course!

## Personal Statements

Admissions Tutors value the personal touch of this section of the Application Form (whether it is the UCAS form or Buckingham's own) because it indicates the student's interests, character and direction. This is a chance to shine and show off about extra-curricular pastimes, ambitions and any additional information that helps you to stand out. At some universities and for some degrees, it may make the difference between gaining a place and having to study elsewhere. Here are some tips:

- There's no need to be wildly 'original'

but do avoid some of the clichés. Admissions Tutors groan when they read for the hundredth time, "During my A level course I have become fascinated by [subject] and really want to take it through to university level." Try to show the real reasons you are interested in a subject – and that your enthusiasm is based on something more than your A level syllabus. If you want to read English Literature, for example, it's impressive if you have developed interests in great authors beyond the sixth form curriculum. Whatever the subject, can you give evidence of reading outside your examination course? Have you

been to lectures about the subject?  
What about part-time work in a related field, or visits to sites and events connected with your subject?

- Admissions Tutors are often impressed by real moral engagement with the world. Can you see beyond or around the usual quests for money, power, and pleasure? Have you done any voluntary work? Are you concerned, really, about the planet? Have you ever helped with charities or charity fund-raising? Have you ever made a meaningful contribution within your school

community? Such things can often be really impressive if written about with humility and honesty.

- Don't forget presentation: spell check carefully as this shows attention to detail; read the statement several times to other people and get their feedback – this is where parents can help – and mistakes show up more easily when work is read aloud.



## Financial Planning

It's important that you work out your likely living costs and learn to budget accordingly. We have talked to students at Buckingham and the table below gives an idea of what to expect (remember that calculations are based on a 40 week Buckingham academic year). You may be able to get by on a little less; and you'll certainly be able to spend far more!

There are branches of all major High Street banks in Buckingham.

Expense	Per Week	Per Year
Accommodation (including utilities)	£100 – 110	£4,000 - £4,400
Food	£30	£1,200
Clothing	£10	£400
Laundry	£5	£200
Telephone	£10	£400
Entertainment, bar, etc.	£25	£1,000
UK Travel		£250
Books		£250

So your annual costs at university are likely to be in the region of £7,500 - £8,000 a year, depending on where you decide to live. Utilities (gas, electricity, water, etc.) are included in most university accommodation charges but are not normally included if you rent a flat or house.

Local students will make large savings if they live at home – especially if parents pay the food bill!

Obviously costs will vary in different parts of the country, and travel costs will soar if your accommodation is some distance from the campus or you decide to make frequent trips home.

No allowance has been made for overseas travel or holidays.

To offset these costs, many students find part-time work. You should be careful that such work does not interfere with your studies: a maximum of 15 hours per week is recommended.



## Fees and Grants: You Don't Get What You Don't Pay For

Student loans to cover tuition fees and help with living costs, along with a maintenance grant are available from the Student Loan Company, (see [www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance)) Buckingham students are eligible to apply for these:

Academic year	2008/09
Repayable loan for fees	up to £3145
Non-repayable maintenance grant*	up to £2835
Student loan for living costs*	up to £4625
<i>*both subject to means testing</i>	

Students repay these loans once they have left university and are earning over £15000.

From September 2008 annual tuition fees for home students at most UK universities will be £3145 – a total of £9435 for a 3-year degree. Buckingham's tuition fees are £8040 per year (January 2009 start) but taking into account the year's saving on living costs afforded by the 2-year programme, the total cost of a 2-year degree can offer a saving compared with 3-year degrees at other universities.

For example, taking the sum of the loan and maintenance grant to represent a typical year's living costs (£4625 + £2835 = £7460):

	Buckingham		Other Universities	
	Tuition	Living costs	Tuition	Living costs
Year One	8040	7460	3145	7460
Year Two	8040	7460	3145	7460
Year Three	0	0	3145	7460
Sub-total	16080	14920	9435	22380
<b>Total</b>	<b>£31000</b>		<b>£31815</b>	

Full details of fees for Home and Overseas students can be found on our website: [www.buckingham.ac.uk/study/fees](http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/study/fees)

Some universities offer scholarships or bursaries. Details of Buckingham's scholarships for candidates of outstanding potential can be found on the Buckingham website at <http://www.buckingham.ac.uk/study/fees/scholarship>

As an independent university, Buckingham relies largely on fee income, and our fees are more than the normal 'top-up' fee., but we hope that this guide has shown the benefits of a Buckingham education. Being independent, the University can choose how it spends its income – and our two over-riding priorities are maintaining excellent teaching in small groups and looking after students. That's why our students rank us so highly in the National Student Survey: from our inception we have understood that students are our customers and should be treated as such.

We believe Buckingham offers excellent value for money. Not only do we offer a high quality of education, but the overall cost of a degree here is competitive with other universities – and you have the chance to start earning a year earlier as well.



## From the Vice-Chancellor

We hope this Guide has helped you think about some of the issues you need to consider when choosing a university. So, take a deep breath and begin exploring your next step. The Vice-Chancellor of the University gets the last word but, from all the staff and students at Buckingham – Good luck and remember that university life is an adventure!

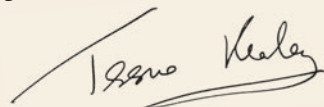
Dear Student,

With more than one hundred and fifty universities in the United Kingdom – and such minefields as ex-polytechnics (or post 1994 universities), 'new' universities (which are at least forty years old), 'red bricks' and 'Russell Groups', league tables and student blogs – making that all-important choice can be daunting.

Being happy at university means being in a good location, choosing the right degree programme and benefiting from good teaching. And now that maintained universities have introduced significant 'top-up' fees, it's only right that you and your parents should be asking just what you are getting for your money.

This guide is designed to introduce some of the issues for potential undergraduates to consider. It will, I hope, help you in making what is a life-changing decision – and of course show you why Buckingham, the only independent University in the United Kingdom with a Royal Charter, is for many students an ideal place to study.

Whatever educational path you choose, all of the staff and students at Buckingham wish you the very best of luck!



Dr Terence Kealey  
Vice Chancellor



## Useful Numbers

### Main Switchboard

Tel: +44 (0) 1280 814080

### General Enquiries

Tel: +44 (0) 1280 820313

Email: [info@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:info@buckingham.ac.uk)

### UCAS Clearing line

(mid August – end September)

Tel: +44 (0) 1280 820299

Email: [clearing@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:clearing@buckingham.ac.uk)

### Admissions & Marketing Manager

Debbie Millns

Tel: +44 (0)1280 820220

Email: [debbie.millns@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:debbie.millns@buckingham.ac.uk)

### Admissions:

#### Law and Sciences

Tricia Brooks & Cherrienne Boniface

Tel: +44 (0)1280 828321/828204

Email: [law&science@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:law&science@buckingham.ac.uk)

### Economics & International Studies

Jaci Garbe

Tel: +44 (0)1280 820369

Email: [internationalstudiesadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:internationalstudiesadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk)



## Useful Numbers

### **Business**

Lyn Hartin  
Tel: +44 (0)1280 820236  
Email: [businessadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:businessadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk)

### **English**

Nancy Zulu  
Tel: +44 (0)1280 820156  
Email: [englishadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:englishadmissions@buckingham.ac.uk)

### **Accommodation Office**

Tel: +44 (0)1280 820258 or +44 (0)1280 820351  
Email: [accommodation@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:accommodation@buckingham.ac.uk)

### **Student Fees Office**

Tel: +44 (0)1280 820250  
Email: [studentfees@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:studentfees@buckingham.ac.uk)

### **Student Support**

Linda Luckhurst - Counsellor  
Tel: +44 (0)1280 828329  
Jane Swindells - Learning Support  
Tel: +44 (0)1280 820200  
Email: [student.support.sec@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:student.support.sec@buckingham.ac.uk)



[www.buckingham.ac.uk](http://www.buckingham.ac.uk)